

Nathaniel Gorham

*Politician, Statesman,
Signer of the U.S. Constitution*

1738-1796



Nathaniel Gorham
Charles Willson Peale, Artist



Signing of the U.S. Constitution, *Howard Chandler Christy, Artist*

Born in Charlestown in 1738, Nathaniel Gorham was a descendant of John Howland, a Mayflower Pilgrim. At about age 15, he was apprenticed to a merchant of New London, Connecticut. When he was 21, Gorham returned to Charlestown, went into business for himself and prospered as a merchant. Married to Rebecca Call, they raised 9 children in a large house on the north side of Charlestown's Market Square (now City Square).

Successful in business, Gorham also became one of the most prominent political leaders of his day. During the Revolution, Gorham was a delegate to the Provincial Congress and a member of the Board of War. After the war, he continued in public service as a statesman, being elected to the Massachusetts constitutional convention and to the Commonwealth's Senate and, later, the General Court. Though lacking in formal legal training, he was appointed a Middlesex County judge. He served two years on the Governor's Council.

In service to the Nation, he sat in the Continental Congress for three terms and was elected President of the Congress in 1786. He was a delegate to the Federal Constitutional Convention in 1787, serving as its presiding officer for several weeks. He was a signer of the resulting U.S. Constitution and a member of the Massachusetts convention at which it received state ratification.

Turning from triumph to tragedy, Gorham, in his later years, participated in a land speculation scheme that went bad, leaving him insolvent but no less respected for his great contributions to the birth of the Government and Constitution of the United States of America.